

VZCZCXRO1572  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHBK #2539/01 2780959  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 050959Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8500  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1973  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 7546  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5843  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 0028  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 7089  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002539

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND: RULING COALITION AGREES TO PATH FORWARD  
ON AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

REF: BANGKOK 2459 (CHARTER CHANGE ONE STEP CLOSER TO  
REALITY)

BANGKOK 00002539 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol Counselor George Kent, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) SUMMARY: The coalition partners in the Abhisit government reached a consensus on October 4 on the way forward in amending the 2007 Constitution. All six coalition parties agreed to empower a parliamentary committee to draft separate bills for each of the six proposed amendments. The full parliament would then have a chance to review the bills in a first reading before putting the amendments to a nationwide referendum. Left undecided was the question of whether the proposed amendments would be grouped together in a referendum, or whether voters would be able to vote on each of the six items individually, as the ruling Democrat Party proposes. In remarks to the media, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva estimated the entire process would take about nine months.

12. (C) COMMENT: The agreement on the way forward, if implemented, will probably take some of the pressure off of PM Abhisit to call early elections, at least in the short-term. However, in late breaking news at COB October 5, the opposition Puea Thai party decided to reject the approach of amending the 2007 Constitution in six places in favor of pushing a referendum on reverting back to the 1997 Constitution (Note: a referendum in 2007 approved the new constitution. End note). Previously, the PT position was a single package vote in favor of the proposed amendments. Senators who backed the 2007 Constitution's terms and the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD, or "yellow-shirts"), however, have already voiced sharp opposition to the amendment plan. End Summary and Comment.

COALITION COALESCES ON PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE  
-----

13. (SBU) PM Abhisit and heavyweights of the six parties that comprise his ruling coalition met on October 4 to formulate a common position on the proposed amendments to the 2007 Constitution (reftel). Attendees included five politicians -- Newin Chitchob, Suwat Liptapanlop, Banharn Silpa-archa, Pinij Jarusombat, and Somsak Thepsuthin -- who are currently serving five-year bans from politics as a result of the

dissolution of then-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai party after his 2006 ouster or, in the case of Banharn, the December 2008 Court decision on 2007 election-related fraud.

¶4. (SBU) Government whip and Democrat Party Member of Parliament Chinnaworn Bunyakiat told us that under the agreement, the Legal Affairs Bureau of the National Assembly will draft a separate bill for each of the six proposed points. Coalition partners decided that the proposed changes should then pass a first reading in the full parliament before being put to a public referendum.

¶5. (SBU) The coalition partners initially were at odds over the timing of the referendum; PM Abhisit preferred a referendum prior to drafting the bills, while Phumjai Thai believed that two of the six amendments should be pushed through without any referendum at all. The other coalition parties wanted the proposals to pass the first reading in parliament before being put to a public vote. No timeline was set for completion of the changes. Abhisit said that he expects the entire process to take approximately nine months; a Democrat Party spokesman said that it could take as little as four months, but Senator Lertrat Ratanavanich, constitutional amendment subcommittee chair, suggested elections would happen no earlier than a year from now, and predicted that the coalition at that point may seek to serve out a full term (through the end of 2011).

CHOPPY WATERS AHEAD FROM BOTH RED AND YELLOW?

¶6. (C) Prior to the late breaking news October 5, Puea Thai Party leader Yongyuth Wichaidit had told us that said the

BANGKOK 00002539 002.2 OF 002

coalition agreement was acceptable to Puea Thai, as it reflected the decision made by the joint whips (including the opposition) the week of September 28. Yongyuth noted that Puea Thai was divided on the issue, with some members siding with leaders of the affiliated red-shirt movement, who argue that any referendum should allow the public to choose between the 1997 and 2007 constitutions, not simply vote on the six proposed points. The flip-flop seems designed to throw more roadblocks into PM Abhisit's efforts to chart a clearly defined path forward over the next year.

¶7. (C) PAD Coordinator and Secretary General of the New Politics Party Suriyasai Katasila confirmed to us October 5 that the PAD remains opposed to both constitutional amendments and the proposed referendum. Politicians have hijacked the process and want to make it nothing more than a process to endorse approval or disapproval of the government itself, he claimed. Suriyasai said the PAD and relatives of the victims of the October 2008 police crackdown on PAD demonstrators would submit a petition to the president of the Senate later October 5, calling for the impeachment of House and Senate members planning to submit the amendment motion to the National Assembly.

JOHN